

Governors' Declaration on Climate Change

Yale University, April 18, 2008

Standing in the shadows of President Theodore Roosevelt, and Gifford Pinchot, the founder of the Yale School of Forestry and first Chief of the US Forest Service, we - Republican and Democratic Governors alike - are gathered to challenge ourselves, our congressional leaders and the Presidential candidates to learn the lessons these men have taught us and fully embrace the conservation challenge of our time: the threat of climate change.

In 1908, Roosevelt and Pinchot stared down those who looked at the nation's natural resources and saw only the riches they could accumulate from the water, lumber, coal and gold. They did what had to be done to make them see the forests for the trees and as a result, future generations have been blessed with a National Park System that is second to none, and over 193 million acres of nationally protected forestlands. Together, they transformed what was then perceived as an isolated conservation elite into a more lasting and effective national movement - one that connected people and nature, and conservation with economic prosperity. And they did so by calling on states to work together - to unite - to strengthen federal policy.

At that time, 100 years ago, President Roosevelt convened a historic Conference of Governors to establish a conservation partnership between the states and the federal government. Always the pragmatist, Roosevelt said, "My concern is not the academic discussion of either the principles of State rights or the principle of National sovereignty, but it's what will best conserve the needs of the people as a whole." What was true in 1908 remains true in 2008.

We recognize that we are facing a new threat to our natural resources and our way of life, and we are prepared to act with similar courage and determination to meet the needs of the public we serve. We are proud that our state and local governments have been in front – taking action to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases that is contributing to the changing climate - and we will continue these efforts, but we cannot do it alone. All levels of government must work together – in cooperation and without regard for party affiliation – if we are to succeed in meeting the challenge before us. We applaud and encourage the enactment of strong and effective federal climate policy, and look forward to the integration of these efforts with those being made at a local, state, and regional level.

Today, we recommit ourselves to the effort to stop global warming and we call on Congressional leaders and the Presidential candidates to work with us – in partnership – to establish a comprehensive national climate policy. Such a policy must be founded on three principles:

- A federal-state partnership is the only way we can get the job done. Success in tackling climate change in the United States will require the full engagement of leadership states in climate governance processes and organizations, as well as support for state innovation and the development of green energy technologies.

- State-based climate action plans and programs have paved the way for cost-effective reductions of greenhouse gases and they deserve continued support.

The comprehensive portfolio of measures taken at the state level across all sectors are real and they work. There are a variety of ways these actions can be further strengthened, and more of them developed and implemented, with federal support.

- Rewarding and encouraging meaningful and mandatory federal and state climate action is the key to success. Incentives for states to provide leadership on climate action are critical. Incentives drive change and they can come from existing federal energy, transportation, and agriculture programs as well as from auction revenue derived from a federal cap and trade system.

These principles underscore our firm belief in the importance of fashioning a role for both states and the federal government in the design and implementation of a comprehensive national climate policy. This is not a case of advocating local, state or regional interests versus federal interests, but rather of promoting an approach and a partnership that will ultimately strengthen this nation's approach to the climate challenges we face.

To build this partnership we will coordinate our efforts and actively solicit the support of all Governors and members of Congress who are also serious about the need to take action now to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases - at all levels of government. In addition, we will reach out to major Presidential candidates as a means of shaping the first 100 days of the next Administration. We have no time to lose.

Together, we are committing to walking in the footsteps of President Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot by embracing the conservation challenge of our lifetime – the threat of climate change. We hope that many others will join in this journey.